

I am writing to express my support for local cable franchising, both as a citizen and as a Public Access TV station executive director. I urge the Federal Communications Commission to keep in place the current franchising processes for any commercial entity which wishes to use The Public Right of Way (PROW) to distribute any communications services.

I have been working in public access since the age of 14. As a young adult, the ability to learn about media was invaluable to my development as an active citizen. For once I was not treated as a passive viewer, but as an active agent. Television programming no longer became something static, but something that I could interact with and understand on a more critical level. Having the ability to speak my own voice through the media also empowered me in a way which helped me to become an engaged citizen. There are few venues in this country where a citizen truly participates in democratic discourse, and because of my experience with public access, I understand and participate in this democracy in a greater capacity.

Sixteen years later, I see these kinds of transformations take place every day as the Executive Director of a Public Access station. I observe citizens, from extremely diverse backgrounds, learn to view media with a more critical eye as they discover what it takes to create television. They become more involved in their community, they participate in the exchange of ideas, and they reflect their diversity back to their community. In no other media outlet in our community will you see the expression of how diverse in ideas, culture, and backgrounds we truly are.

From the middle school band concert, to the night life of down town Chapel Hill. To issues about seniors and the Latino community, to Islam and Muslim education. From every religious background, to the local non-profit community organization. Public access provides our community a snap shot of our community. It helps us understand our different cultures and histories. It forces us to think about different political arenas and shows us what local organizations are doing to help the community. It mirrors what this country is based on: democracy.

There are many reasons why the franchising process works, and why Public, Educational and Government Access are important to our communities. Please don't let telecom corporations, which already dictate the marketplace of ideas, take away local control, local content, and local democratic discourse.

Thank you for your time,

Chad A. Johnston

